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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000113

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/I AND NEA/IR
NSC STAFF FOR OLLIVANT AND MAGSAMEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/14/2018
TAGS: [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: MEK UPDATE: DEFECTOR CLAIMS MEK HAS CONTINGENCY
PLAN FOR MASS SUICIDE; MEK, IRAQI AUTHORITIES BOOST
ENGAGEMENT

REF: A. BAGHDAD 003
[1](#)B. 2008 BAGHDAD 4006

Classified By: Acting Pol-Mil Counselor Philip Kosnett
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: A defector from Camp Ashraf, home to the Mujahedin e-Khalq (MeK) in Iraq, says the group's leadership at Camp Ashraf is prepared to order residents to kill themselves to protest any arrests of Ashraf residents. The defector (now under the care of the Ministry of Human Rights and awaiting an ICRC interview) also said that Camp Ashraf residents (CAR) would stage peaceful demonstrations against any sustained Iraqi Army presence in the camp. The defection comes at a time of increased cooperation between the MeK and GoI, which assumed responsibility for security of the camp on January 1 and assured the USG of humanitarian treatment of the CAR. We cannot rule out the possibility this defector is a plant sent by the MEK leadership to discourage the GOI from executing arrest warrants on individuals wanted by the Iranian government. However, his story is consistent with what we know about MeK practice and philosophy, and neither can we discount the possibility of contingency plans by the group for protest suicides. END SUMMARY.

Background

[1](#)2. (C) The MeK is a U.S. designated foreign terrorist organization dedicated to the overthrow of the Iranian Islamic government. It operates as a personality cult centered on Iranian dissidents Massoud and Maryam Rajavi. The 3,400 residents of Camp Ashraf live communally (males and females separately), supported by light manufacturing and donations from abroad. They claim to have turned over all their arms to U.S. forces in 2003, and their camp 60 miles from Baghdad looks more like a relatively affluent Iraqi village than a military garrison. However, until the end of 2008, residents wore military-style uniforms and flew pre-revolution Iranian flags, and U.S. forces stationed at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Grizzly on the periphery of the camp report that they continue to practice small unit military tactics and maneuvers under cover of darkness.

Defector

[1](#)3. (C) On January 13, Ashraf resident Maky Rafii, 34, left the camp and presented himself to Iraqi and U.S. troops outside the gate. Rafii told U.S. forces interviewing him that he had lived in the camp for six years, working in MeK

public relations. Although a resident of the camp, he was not a sworn member of the MeK, he said. Describing camp conditions, he said camp leaders try to exercise thought control over members of the group through mass meetings. In one recent meeting, members exchanged text messages with someone claiming to be MEK leader Massoud Rajavi, who has not been seen since the Coalition Forces (CF) invasion of Iraq in 2003. Rafii urged the USG to hold surprise meetings with Ashraf residents so that the leadership would not have time to coach them. Rafii added that the Camp Ashraf leadership is trying to develop good relations with the GoI to drive a wedge between the Iraqi and Iranian Governments and keep Camp Ashraf open. However, a number of the residents want to leave the camp, he said.

14. (C) When he decided to leave, Rafii said CAR kept him in the "exit house" (halfway house) for three days, trying to convince him to change his mind. When he refused, however, they offered to drive him to Irbil, but they then drove him to the front gate. He walked out of the camp on January 13 and turned himself over to Iraqi Army soldiers manning a checkpoint at the entrance. Thinking the resident was attempting to flee the camp, the soldiers treated him roughly, searching and holding him on the ground until a U.S. military officer from FOB Grizzly arrived to take him back to the base, where he spent the night. On January 15, Iraqi Army units drove Rafii to Baghdad and turned him over to the Ministry of Human Rights, which is housing him with another recent MeK defector.

Cooperation

BAGHDAD 00000113 002 OF 002

15. (C) Rafii said the MeK is trying to build goodwill with the GoI in order to drive a wedge between the Iraqi and Iranian governments, and in fact the defection comes at a time of increased GoI and CAR cooperation. Camp leaders have held weekly meetings with a GoI committee responsible for the issue, along with USG representatives from the Embassy and MNF-I. At the last such meeting Jan. 10, the MeK complied with a GoI request for a roster of all camp members and a list of weapons, including tanks, artillery, light arms and ammunition, that the MeK turned over to U.S. forces in 2003. MG Abeal Al-Hossaen Damock, Diyala provincial police commander, arrived at the meeting with 50 police officers and, he said, 14 arrest warrants for Ashraf residents. However, Iraqi Army MG Alaa Salmin Jasim, who had previously assured Embassy and MNF-I representatives that Iraqi police would not be allowed to arrest Ashraf residents, told Damock not to execute the warrants. Damock complied, participated in the meeting, and left without serving the warrants.

16. (C) On a working level, camp residents have provided Iraqi Army units now guarding the camp with meals, provided a trailer for the Iraqi commanding officer, provided a meeting room for the GoI committee, and installed space heaters in guard towers for the Iraqi troops. They also continue to build goodwill with surrounding Iraqi villages by providing employment in the camp, and last week Camp Ashraf doctors treated an Iraqi child with a serious head injury.

17. (C) The GoI has pressed the MeK for an opportunity to directly address Ashraf residents, followed by individual one-on-one interviews to be conducted by the Ministry of Human Rights with the ultimate goal of voluntarily repatriating the CAR to Iran or finding a third country for them if they do not want to return. Embassy and MNF-I representatives are scheduled to join the GoI committee in a meeting with CAR on January 18.

18. (C) COMMENT: Particularly in light of the organization's ability to mount large-scale information operations and the

defector's professed background in public relations, we cannot rule out the possibility this defector is a plant sent by the MeK leadership to discourage the GOI from executing arrest warrants on individuals wanted by the Iranian government. However, his story is consistent with what we know about MeK practice and philosophy, and we cannot discount the possibility of contingency plans by the group for protest suicides, a tactic the MeK used in the past.

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